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Irving ~~Home~~
459 Court Street
Florence, Alabama
LAUDERDALE Co.

HABS No. ALA-332

HABS
ALA.

39-FLO

3-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Auburn, Alabama

IRVINE HOME - 459 *Cowh Street*
Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama.

Ownership:

Present Owner: Miss Jennie Irvine; from 1880 to 1935

Previous Owners: John Simpson; from 1830 to 1850.
Mrs. Richard Walker; from 1850 to 1867.
James B. Irvine; from 1867 to 1880.

Date of Erection: 1830.

Architect: Unknown.

Builder: John Simpson.

Present Condition: Good state of preservation; The old kitchen is built onto the right end of the house and is still in use. There was an addition of four small rooms several years ago to the right rear.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Brick with composition shingle hip roof; the exterior walls are about 18" thick and the inside about 14". It has a one story porch about two thirds across the front with six very small box columns. One third of the porch floor (that section in front of the door) is of limestone rock, the other sections on each side is of wood framing and flooring. The porch steps are of limestone rock. The interior floors are of 8" heart of pine flooring; interior walls are of plaster and wall paper. All of the trim work is of hand carved material; the interior doors have a double panel, there is a large sliding door between the double parlor. The stairway ascends from a small hall to the right of the large one, the house consists of thirteen rooms and two halls.

Other Existing Records:

Source of Material: Miss Jennie Irvine, Florence, Ala.

Compiled by: Katherine Floyd and J. B. Vaughn

Approved: E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, HABS
9/21/1936

Addendum to:
Irvine House
(Simpson-Irvine House)
459 N. Court Street
Florence
Lauderdale County
Alabama

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
IRVINE HOUSE
(SIMPSON-IRVINE PLACE)

ADDENDUM TO:
HABS No. AL-332

Location: 459 North Court Street (west side of Court Street between Irvine and Tuecaloosa Streets, Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama)

Present Owner: Mr. & Mrs. Madding King

Present Occupant: Same as owner

Significance: Outstanding ante-bellum town residence; one of a group of architecturally similar dwellings in the Muacle Shoals area, including Sweetwater (AL-333) and the William Winston or Berton-Winton House (AL-316), now Deahler High School, Tuscumbie

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1843
2. Architect: Unknown (although possibly Nathaniel H. Marks, early Lauderdale County builder)
3. Original and subsequent owners: The house was built on the site of an earlier frame residence for John and Margeret Patton Simpson. John Simpson was a wealthy merchant of Florence, and immigrant to America from Northern Ireland. The house was acquired circa 1855 by James Bennington Irvine, a prominent planter and attorney, and his wife, Virginia Foeter Irvine (daughter of George Washington Foeter, builder of nearby "Courtview"). The Simpeone subsequently moved to their plantation in the Colbert Reserve. The house has remained in the Irvine family since that time with Mrs. King (nee Harriet Susan Rogere) being a direct descendent of James and Virginia Irvine.
4. Alterations and additions: The circa 1855, one-room wing which occupied the site of the present north wing was several steps lower than the first floor of the main block of the house. Interior access was gained through the rear of the stair hall. The old wing served as a kitchen at the time of its demolition and replacement in 1946-47. The original kitchen was in the basement. The new wing incorporates some of the brick from the older structure and harmonizes with the house in line and proportion. Completely reconditioned and restored by

Mr. and Mrs. King, who moved in during the spring of 1948. The restoration architect was Mr. Dudley E. Jones of Memphis, Tennessee.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Good example of regional ante-bellum dwelling incorporating late Federal characteristics and some simple Greek Revival elements. The woodwork demonstrates the high quality of Florence cabinetry (the Federal-period woodwork in the Muscle Shoals area is unexcelled in Alabama).
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This is a two-story brick house with attic and full basement. It is rectangular (approx. 60' x 48'), with a one-story modern service wing on the north side, replacing a ca. 1855 addition originally used by James Bennington Irvine as a law office. The five-bay principle facade faces east.
2. Foundations: The brick foundation walls are continuous under both the exterior walls and the interior brick partitions.
3. Wall construction: The brick bearing walls appear to be approximately 18" thick, the brick of the east (front) elevation is laid in Flemish bond.
4. Porches: There are two porticoes, composed of slender square wooden columns, on both east and west elevations. The porticoes date from the 1946-47 remodeling. The east portico is three-bays wide and encompasses the middle (entrance) bay with flanking windows. This portico replaced a smaller three-bay, one-story porch probably of late 19th century origin and adorned with Victorian scrollwork. Traces of the pilaster outlines from an even earlier single-story portico, encompassing only the entrance bay, may still be seen to either side of the front door. (This small portico probably resembled the extant porches of Sweetwater and the William Winston house). The west portico extends the full five-bay length of the rear elevation. Its columns rest on original, ground-level brick paving. Beneath the portico, a brick stoop with a double flight of steps and an ornamental iron railing provides access to the west door. Parallel to the ascending steps, another pair of steps leads to the basement door beneath the

stoop. The rear porch, or gallery, shown in the HABS photographs of 1934 and 1935 was a full-length one-story structure, with six square wooden posts resting on the brick pavement and supporting a shed roof. This was possibly the original back porch, which sheltered a brick stoop similar to the present one.

5. Chimneys: there are four brick chimneys, symmetrically arranged; two in the north wall and two in the south

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors (exterior): The principal outside doorways, one on the east elevation and the other on the west, are each composed of a rectangular transom with four-pane sidelights.. A stone lintel caps both doorways. The single-leaf doors are fashioned of walnut (the west door being a replica, installed in the 1946-47 renovation, of the original east door). Each door has four vertical recessed panels, two longer panels above and four shorter ones below. The sidelights have paneled interior shutters.

b. Windows: The windows are nine-over-nine-light double hung sash except for the middle second-story window of the east and west elevations, each of which is twelve-over-twelve. This variation was possibly employed to better correspond with the doors directly below in proportion. Of particular note is that all upstairs windows are slightly smaller than downstairs windows, in observance of classically prescribed rules of proportion and beauty. Moulded architraves with corner rosettes enframe the exterior of all windows (a motif found frequently in the ante-bellum architecture of the Muscle Shoals area). Window sills and lintels are finished stone. The south elevation has two end bays originally and two inner bays added later during remodeling. Oblong basement windows, also framed by a wooden architrave with stone sills and lintels, are found at the west elevation.

7. Roof: A shallow hip roof terminates in a small deck, and there is a simple box cornice at the eaves. The one-story north wing is covered with a half-hip roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The plan is the typical center-hall plan of the period, and is essentially the same on all three floors (basement included). The bisecting main hallway is flanked by two rooms on either side, the two north

rooms being separated by a stairhall which intersects the main hallway at right angles. (The side stairhall is another characteristic feature of several dwellings of this area from the 1825-1860 period.) A formal dining room occupies the northeast corner of the first floor, and a guest bedroom the northwest corner. Each measures 21'9" x 17'7". Double drawing rooms, each 22' x 22', lie to the south of the main hall. The two bedrooms on the south side of the second floor (above the drawing rooms) apparently had a dressing room space between originally. This area has now been adapted to accommodate modern bathrooms, installed in 1946-47.

Originally whitewashed and paved with brick embedded in sand, the basement originally may have served various utilitarian functions in addition to containing the kitchen, from which food was carried up to the dining room via the interior stair. During 1946-47 the basement was completely reconditioned and the brick floor reconstituted with mortar, then polished with linseed oil for preservation and beauty. Presently, the basement contains a family room in the southwest corner, and other service facilities.

During the 1946-47 renovation, the second-floor central hallway was enclosed at either end to provide additional storage space. This was accomplished with great sensitivity, however, to matching this work with the basic character of the house.

2. Stairways: The stairway connecting the first and second floors rises in a series of 19 shallow treads along the west wall of the side hallway to a landing, then continues, in reverse flight, six more treads to the second floor. The stairway balustrade with slender, unadorned spindles, terminates in a scrolled volute. Immediately above the first stage of the main stairway, an enclosed stair rises from the second floor to the attic. The straight-run basement stair with wooden balustrade is directly below the main stair.
3. Flooring: Most of the flooring, consisting of random-width pine, appears to be original, and is in excellent condition.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plastered. The south wall of the main hallway is now papered with a floral design motif: Zubar decor chinois. According to family tradition, the original hall wallpaper design was "Lady of the Lake." A wide, simply moulded baseboard is present throughout the house. Apparently, the house did not have chair rails.

originally, although one was installed in the dining room and hallway during the 1946-47 renovation. A plaster medallion, or centerpiece, adorns the ceiling of the main hallway; the motif is a simple floral design. Plaster cornices found throughout the house were installed in 1946-47.

5. Doorways and doors: The doorways in the basement and on the second floor are enframed by fluted architraves with corner rosettes. Fixed, panelled transoms, consisting of two vertical panels, occur above the first-floor doors opening into the main hallway. The panelled transom to the northwest bedroom functions as a moveable transom. Other transoms have apparently always been stationary. (The transom motif also occurs in the circa 1832 James Irvine House, HABS No. AL-358, directly west of Irvine Place at 461 North Pine Street -- James Irvine being the father of James Bennington Irvine.) The doors themselves are of walnut construction, embellished with a "double-cross" motif which is a variant of the typical Federal-period "Cross-and Bible" design. The "double-cross" feature characteristic of woodwork in Florence area. A highly unusual element is the linenfold-like fluting which decorates one side of each of the raised panels in the second-floor doorway leading to the attic stairs. This same motif appears in one basement door. Another feature of special note is the massive, panelled double door connection the front and rear drawing rooms. 6. Other decorative features: Original mantelpieces remain throughout the house, the most outstanding being the pair of dark Italian marble mantels in the drawing rooms. Their design echoes the fluted architraves with corner rosettes on the exteriors of the doors and windows. The mantel in the southeast bedroom repeats in its design the linenfold treatment previously mentioned. The northwest bedroom on the first floor (possibly used as a dining room originally) contains an unusual built-in clothes press/closet with panelled double-leaf doors. This closet is adjacent to the chimney in the northwest corner of the room. At present, the house contains many heirloom furnishings, including oil portraits of James Bennington and Virginia (Foster) Irvine, who acquired the house during the decade before the Civil War.
7. Hardware: Original Tennessee-manufactured patent box lock may still be found on some of the doors.
8. Mechanical equipment: the present heating and duct system dates from 1947-47. Ducts themselves are concealed beneath the window sills.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The lot occupied by Irvine Place extends east and west through the block bounded by Court and Pine Streets. There is one private residence to the north on Pine Street, while the adjacent area to the south is partially open, except for some small business establishments and the Trinity Episcopal Church and Parish House.
2. Landscaping: When the house was restored in the 1940's, the firm of John F. Highberger and Associates of Memphis was engaged to develop a landscape design for the surrounding grounds which would incorporate elements of the original landscaping. Large trees and shrubs surround the house. The original, semicircular front walkway, outlined with brick and bordered with English boxwood, is preserved on the Court Street side of the lot. To prevent erosion, a low brick retaining wall was constructed parallel to the sidewalk here in 1946-47. From the west (rear) portico, a greenward extends unbrokenly to Pine Street. On the south side of the house is a rectangular garden terrace, enclosed by an ornamental hedge. On the north side of the house, immediately beyond the wing, is a small parking area and garage. A driveway leads from Pine Street to the west portico and the garage area.
3. Outbuilding: None of the original outbuildings remain. The garage, a single-story, brick, hipped roof structure, harmonizes architecturally with the house. It is largely concealed from street view by the surrounding plantings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interview: Personal interview with Mrs. Madding King, December 31, 1976.

B. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Tennessee Valley Historical Society, Historic Muscle Shoals (first edition), Sheffield, Alabama: Standard Print, 1964, pp. 43-44.

Tennessee Valley Historical Society, Historic Muscle Shoals Revised Bicentennial Edition), vol. IV (1976) of the Journal of Muscle Shoals History, p. 61.

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service